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Teens Take Stands on Social Issues

America's teens today are beset by a multitude of social changes that for the most part were unknown to their parents and elders when they were of comparable age. Affirmative action, animal rights, AIDS, gay activisim, and abortion just a generation ago either were unknown or not considered matters of controversy.

While their parents demonstrated for civil rights, today's teens more likely would engage in debates over affirmative action programs. Nine in 10 (92%) say they support programs to help minorities get better jobs and into good colleges. A majority (56%), however, also say they would like to see merit programs instead of the current equal opportunity programs.

Protection of endangered species is supported by 87 percent of teens, and two in three (66%) say they support animal rights even if it means that all laboratory and medical tests that use animals would be eliminated.

Condom distribution to high school students to help stem the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases has been debated in many churches, but draws the support of 82 percent of the teens interviewed on the survey. Catholic officials often have been in the vanguard of those opposing condom distribution, but 86 percent of the Catholic teens say they support the idea.

Those who oppose condom distribution frequently advocate instead establishing counseling centers where students can learn to practice sexual abstinence until after marriage. Although they frequently are derided as "chastity centers" by those who oppose them, the counseling centers are endorsed by 65 percent of teens.

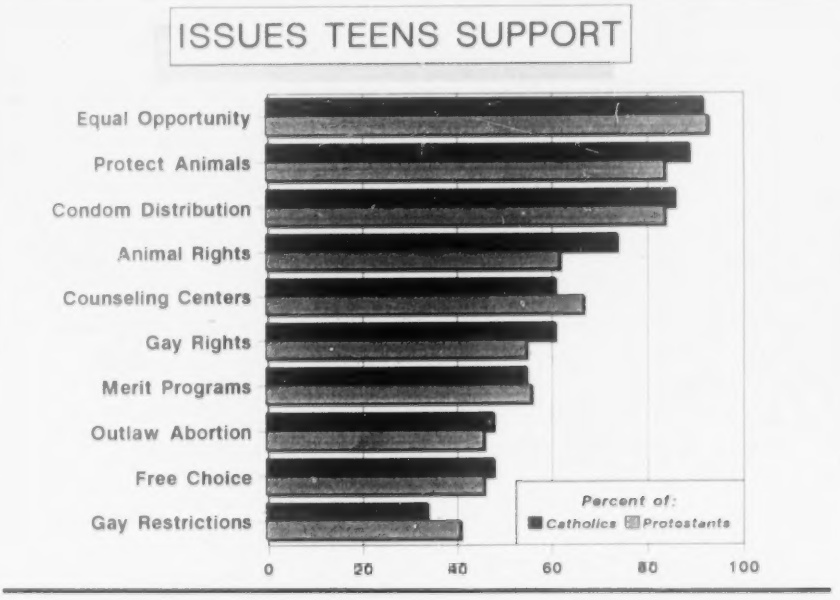
The role of gays in the church has been at the center of some of the most acrimonious debates that several denominations have witnessed in the past several years. A slight majority of teens (54%) say they believe there should be greater legal protection and constitutional rights for gays. Opposing this idea are 37 percent who say instead there should be laws to prevent gays from marrying, teaching young children, or serving in the U.S. armed forces.

Teens are sharply divided on the issue of abortion, and extreme positions fail to gain majority support.

Less than half (47%) say they believe a woman should be allowed to have an abortion for any reason she chooses.

Slightly fewer (44%) go to the opposite extreme to support legislation that would outlaw abortions for any reason.

The findings are from a Gallup Youth Survey conducted by telephone with a representative national cross section of 513 teen-agers, 13 through 17, conducted during the period of June 26 to July 2, 1991.



One in Four Aware of "New Age"

Some say the New Age is a religion, others that it is only a collection of superstitions, while its own adherents often feel it goes beyond traditional religion and science.

Because of the many often conflicting interpretations and definitions, we asked survey respondents to report awareness and belief of New Age practices, without identifying them as such. In investigating their overall attitudes towards the New Age movement, the respondents were not given a definition of the movement, but were free to define it in any way they pleased in responding to the questions.

Whatever they may think of it, one adult in four (24%) by now has heard or read about the New Age. Among the college graduates, awareness of the movement rises to 38 percent. The U.S. origins of New Age usually are traced to the West coast, but although awareness there is higher than in other regions, news of the movement has penetrated to all regions of the country.

Among those who are aware of the New Age movement, just 18 percent say they have a favorable opinion of it. Unfavorably impressed by the movement are half of the "aware" group (49%), while 33 percent have not formed an opinon of it. Younger adults under 30 (25%) are most likely to have a favorable impression of the movement. Positive opinon of New Age drops to 19 percent of those who are ages 30 to 49, and to just 9 percent among those people 50 and older.

Very few of those who are aware of the New Age movement (7%) believe it has a beneficial effect upon traditional religions. One in three (35%) feels New Age is a threat to traditional beliefs, while about another third (36%) say its impact is neutral.

Holding no opinion of the relationship between New Age and traditional religions are 22 percent of the aware group. Only 13 percent of the aware group consider New Age to be good for U.S. society in general. It is considered bad for our way of life by 34 percent, and 33 percent say it has no effect either way upon American society. One person in five (20%) cannot judge the matter.

One adult in three (34%) who is aware of New Age believes that one can be a good Christian or Jew and also believe in it. Disagreeing that the movement is compatible with established religious belief are 45 percent of the aware group, and 17 percent hold no opinion.

Catholics tend to be far more tolerant of New Age beliefs than are Protestants. Over half of the Catholics who are aware of New Age (59%) say it is not incompatible with their religion, compared to 23 percent of Protestants who hold similar views. New Age is considered good for traditional religions by 9 percent of the aware Catholics, but only 5 percent of the Protestants agree with them. Overall, Catholics (30%) are three times as likely as Protestants (10%) to say they have a favorable opinon of New Age.

The findings on the New Age movement reported in this issue are based on telephone interviews with a representative nationwide sample of 2,045 adults, ages 18 and older, conducted in the period of July to September 1990. For findings based on samples of this size, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 3 percentage points in either direction.

Awareness of New Age

National	24%
Male	24
Female	24
Ages 18-29	24
30 to 49	31
50 and older	17
College graduates	38
Attended college	28
High school grads	19
Non-high school grads	16
East	20
Midwest	23
South	24
West	31
Protestant	25
Catholic	18

Opinion of New Age
(Based on Aware Group)

	Protestant	Catholic
Favorable opinion of New Age	10%	30%
Good for traditional religions	5	9
Compatible with traditional religion	23	59
Good for U.S. society	10	11

Many Christians Accept New Age Beliefs...

Few Christians maintain that "New Age" beliefs are beneficial to organized religion or are compatible with Judeo-Christian beliefs, but a surprisingly high number say they believe in many of the practices of the New Age movement.

The New Age movement places particularly strong stress upon the paranormal, or the act of harnessing untapped mental powers. Although certain of these paranormal beliefs have found no place in science, many Christians join New Agers in believing such powers exist.

Deja vu, the feeling that one was once in a place or had the same experience before, is commonplace among many people, but so are other powers. About half of adult American Protestants (46%) and Catholics (52%) believe in extrasensory perception (ESP), the ability to perceive the thoughts or feelings by means other than through the five traditional senses.

Clairvoyance, or the ability to see in the mind or through some medium such as a crystal ball, events that are taking place in the future or at another place, is thought possible by 22 percent of Protestants and 30 percent of Catholics. Even more Protestants (33%) and Catholics (38%) believe in mental telepathly through which people can communicate their thoughts to others through pure mental energy. "Telekinesis," the belief that mental powers can be used to manipulate physical objects–the bending of spoons is popular among New Agers–is thought possible by 14 percent of the Protestants and 15 percent of the Catholics who were interviewed on the survey.

New Agers are, of course, not unique in believing in the devil, as 62 percent of Protestants and 51 percent of Catholics feel there is such a malevolent being. Almost as many (54% Protestants, 43% Catholics) think it is also possible that a person can be possessed by the devil. Witches, often acquiring new respectability in New Age circles as "white witches" to distinguish their benign nature from their mediaeval antecedents, are thought to exist by 14 percent of Protestants and 13 percent of Catholics.

Both New Agers and Christians usually believe in life after death. Some Christian believers in recent years have shown interest in studying "near-death experiences," but this interest usually does not extend to beliefs in ghosts, haunted houses, poltergeists and the like, which generally are considered to be matters for spiritualism rather than for Christian religion. The New Agers, however, often also believe in such beings and in the possibility of communicating with them. This belief is shared by 14 percent of Protestant adults and 23 percent of Catholics.

"Channeling" is the belief that it is possible for the spirit of a dead person or of an "extraterrestrial" to take possession of one's body and mind. One Christian in 10 (10%) shares this belief with New Agers.

Some Christian fundamentalists and charismatics believe it is possible to heal the physical body by the "laying on of hands" and similar acts, and so it is not surprising that 44 percent of Protestants and 48 percent of Catholics believe in psychic healing. A few also think that healing can be obtained through such New Age instruments as pyramids (5% Protestant, 6% Catholic) and rock crystals (3% Protestant, 5% Catholic).

Astrology often was confounded with religion in the early and mediaeval Christian church, but now generally is considered inconsistent with orthodox Christian belief. One Protestant (25%) and Catholic (27%) in four believes that the affairs of their lives may be governed by movements of the heavenly bodies.

Beliefs

	Protestant	Catholic
Deja vu	51%	63%
ESP	46	52
Clairvoyance	22	30
Telepathy	33	38
Telekinesis	14	15
The devil	62	51
Possession by the devil	54	43
Witches	14	13
Life after death	74	84
Communicating with dead	14	23
Channeling	11	10
Psychic healing	44	48
Pyramids	5	6
Rock Crystals	3	5

...and New Age Practices

The line separating established religious belief and practice from superstitions and cult practices often can be thin and indistinct. Many who consider themselves good Christians nonetheless have engaged in practices that seemingly are counter to the teachings of their church.

"Deja vu," or the feeling that one has been in a place or had the same experience before is commonplace, but New Age adherents are joined by some Christians in the belief that they can exercise mental powers far beyond this strange feeling. About one Catholic (25%) and Protestant (22%) in four believes he has engaged in mental telepathy by communicating thoughts or emotions to other people without using the five known senses. Some Catholics (7%) and Protestants (5%) say they have gone even further in the exercise of their mental "powers" by using telekinesis to move physical objects.

Talking with the devil has often been recorded in Christian history, but today more often is reported by Protestants (11%) than by Catholics (5%). Christian theology generally does not recognize contact with the dead, but some Christians maintain they have been in touch in varying degrees with those who are deceased. Nearly one Christian in five (17%) says he has contacted a dead person. Haunted houses have been a reality for 17 percent of Catholics and 12 percent of Protestants. Ghosts have been seen or felt by one Christian in 11 (9%).

Catholics (11%) are twice as likely as Protestants (5%) to believe in reincarnation through the experience of feeling that they had lived on earth before in a different body. Few Catholics (2%) or Protestants (1%) believe, however, that their current body has been "channeled" by having their mind and body possessed temporarily by a being from the past or from outer space.

Self healing through the power of the mind has long been recognized as matter of faith by some Christian denominations, and as a powerful force by psychosomatic medicine. Some New Age adherents believe the power of self healing can be enhanced by using rock crystals or pyramids to tap hidden sources of supernatural energy. A few Catholics (3%) and Protestants (2%) have tried using rock crystals. Even fewer (2% Catholics, 1% Protestants) have experimented with pyramids as healing instruments.

Astrological horoscopes have long been discredited by church and science alike, but better than one in four of the Protestants (28%) and Catholics (24%) interviewed on the survey say they read their horoscope at least weekly. Beyond just reading their horoscope in their favorite daily newspaper, about one in twenty (6% Catholic, 5% Protestant) has consulted with a fortune teller. Even more Catholics (17%) and Protestants (12%) have sought to have their futures foretold by a fortune teller or a spiritual medium.

Experiences

	Protestant	Catholic
Deja vu	52%	64%
Telepathy	22	25
Telekinesis	5	7
Talked to devil	11	5
Contacted dead	17	17
In haunted house	12	17
Saw ghost	9	9
Reincarnated	5	11
Channeled	1	2
Used crystals	2	3
Used pyramid	1	2
Saw fortune teller	12	17
Saw astrologer	5	6

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If you would like to place an order, please include $2.00 for postage and handling. If you would like to receive more information about these publications, contact the Princeton Religion Research Center, 47 Hulfish Street, P.O. Box 389, Princeton NJ 08542. Telephone (609) 921-8112.

Defining the "New Age"

The New Age is not a church, not a sect, not a politcal party. It is an eclectic term for a wide range of beliefs held by some who may call themselves "New Agers" or "Aquarians." The contemporary terms used by New Age adherents may appear to be original, but it could be argued that many, if not all, of their beliefs date back to the earliest recorded thoughts of the human race. The disputes between those holding New Age beliefs, and scientists who view their "paradigm shifts" with utter skepticism, and theologians who usually see their ashrams and "harmonic convergences" as akin to pagan witchcraft, have been going on for thousands of years in every culture. The relationship among these three forces was spelled out by Bronislaw Malinowski in his essay, *Magic, Science and Religion*, when he commented upon the analyses of James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*:

"Magic, based on man's confidence that he can dominate nature directly, if only he knows the laws which govern it magically, is in this akin to science. Religion, the confession of human impotence in certain matters, lifts man above the magical level, and later on maintains its independence side by side with science, to which magic has to succumb."

To critic and adherent alike, the New Age may be reminiscent of the 1960s and 1970s, when young people viewed with horror what science and established religion seemingly had wrought upon Vietnam, their materialistic parents, minorities, women, and the environment. As they sang of the dawning of an "Age of Aquarius," marijuana then seemed to make more sense than alcohol, and tarot cards appeared to be at least as reliable as the cybernetical theories of decision making employed by the Pentagon. While evangelical leaders held prayer meetings at the White House and in the halls of Congress, young people were turning to gurus and swamis of eastern religion who promised a vision beyond what to many seemed a world gone mad. Horoscopes were often seen as more reliable than SAT or GRE scores as predictors of the future. Homeopathic medicine was welcomed as an alternative to a scientific establishment that produced napalm and thalidomide babies. Earth Day in 1970 raised consciousness about the environment, but also made many more people receptive to the message of those who preached gospels such as Gaia, the worship of nature, itself.

Almost incredibly, many of the members of this younger generation were then transformed into the yuppies of the 1980s who yielded to the rampant greed of that era. Undoubtedly, for some the transition was eased by rites of passage provided by Werner Erhard's est, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's TM, L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology, and a host of similar techniques that were embraced and modified by corporate America, and even by the military as a means of training super salesmen and go-getters. On Wall Street for many it was just a short stroll from the *I Ching* to the "random walk hypothesis."

Hollywood contributed visions of a world and universe inhabited by poltergeists on Long Island, Jeddi warriors who invoke the Manichaean aspects of the "force," benign extraterrestrial creatures who like chocolate and computer music, sinister aliens, ectoplasmic ghosts in midtown Manhattan, dark crystals, Halloween nightmares, and suburban witches in Connecticut.

Supermarket tabloids found new audiences and increased circulation as they moved beyond gory murders and sex scandals to reports of contacts with Elvis from the other world, eyewitness accounts from UFO abductees, historical notes from reincarnation memories, and tips on tapping the hidden powers of crystals and pyramids.

Marketers and Madison Avenue were quick to catch the crest of the wave, as in this advertisment which appeared recently in a popular magazine:

"The power crystal. Close at hand. Energy at your fingertips. Captivating crystal aglow with New Age vitality. Capturing the spirit of well-being and inner harmony.

Natural quartz crystal draws the power to you. Channeling prisms of light into positive energy. New awareness. New style... Crystal Power. Clearly, style for The New Age. Priced at just $195. Only from The Franklin Mint."

Three in 10 Teens Believe in Witches

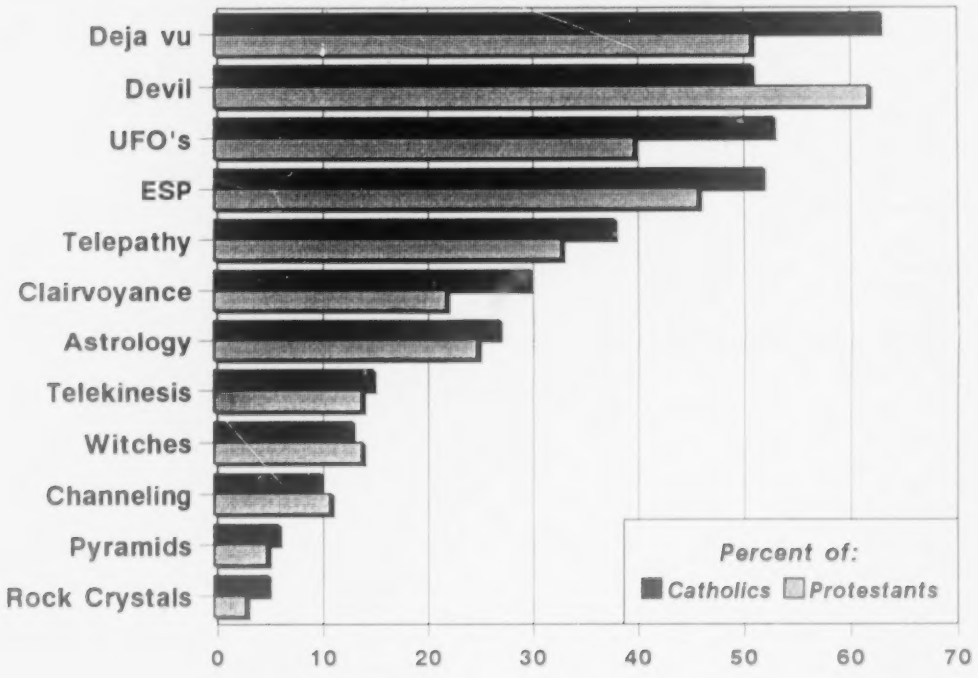
An extraordinarily high percentage of teens believe in witches - 29%, twice the percentage recorded for adults (14%).

Six in 10 teen-agers (59%) believe in astrology, more than twice the proportion found for adults (25%). Roughly equal percentages of teens and adults believe in ESP, ghosts and clairvoyance, as seen in the table below:

Beliefs of Teens, Adults

	Teens	Adults
Witches —	29%	14%
Astrology	58	25
ESP	50	49
Ghosts	22	25
Clairvoyance	21	26

BELIEF IN THE PARANORMAL



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